

## Called To Follow Jesus 7 - Mark 2:23-3:6

As always, I want to encourage you to engage with the passage (Mark 1:14-20) for yourselves - read over it a few times, talk about the things that stand out, the questions you have, things that might have a direct impact in your life (areas for change and transformation). The Holy Spirit speaks to us when we engage with Scripture together and might have things for you and your group that never crossed my radar.

Here are some resources that I borrowed from, in case anyone wants to dig a little deeper:

<https://overviewbible.com/pharisees/>

<https://overviewbible.com/masoretic-text/>

<https://www.bemadiscipleship.com/85> - Some interesting overview stuff on Mark

<https://www.bemadiscipleship.com/107> - Good stuff on Torah, Mishnah, Sabbath, and yoke (from Matthew's account of our passage)

But... if you want some questions, here they are. Feel free to pick and choose, and/or create your own!

- Why were the Pharisees concerned about breaking the Sabbath? What might they be protecting or trying to encourage?
- How does the story of David engage with the Pharisees' question? How does Jesus' statement in v27 connect?
- Was any of the background on the Pharisees interesting or surprising to you? Discuss what you may have learned (script below for reference)
- Are there areas where you identify with the Pharisees? Share...
- If willing, share ways that you may have focused on obedience rather than love (ref Shammai and Hillel in script) AND/OR share where you've been/seen hurt from that focus
- How can we build/maintain/grow the curiosity and humility needed to avoid judging and writing off people who are or believe differently to us?
- Where have you noticed Jesus' focus on love > obedience? Are there particular stories from the gospels that are memorable for you?
- Share where you have seen Christians living out Hosea 6:6
- How can we navigate the tension between love and obedience? How do we work out where to draw the line?
- How do you, personally, feel about the idea of practicing Sabbath weekly? Does it feel like a burden, or a gift, or...?
- Have you practiced, or seen others practice, Sabbath well? Share the effect, positive or negative, of Sabbath
- How could you, personally, take a step or two in building your Sabbath practice? How can you, as a group, work together on this?

## Pharisees

[Just in case it's helpful here's part of my script on the Pharisees for those who weren't there on Sunday]

The Pharisees were a group of Jews who were deeply passionate about the Torah - the first 5 books of what we call the Old Testament - the core of the Jewish Scriptures. I'd always assumed that the Pharisees were all religious leaders, or the power hungry elite, but I discovered this week that it's more interesting than that!

The Pharisees (a word which means 'separated ones') were a collection of factions that was actually made up mostly of Torah-concerned laymen (not the elites) who wanted to extend purity from the priests and the temple into the lives of ordinary Jews. That's a good thing! Almost a bit like our ancestors who wanted to translate the Bible from Latin into the language of the common people so they could hold their faith for themselves.

There's not a whole lot of source material on the Pharisees, and it seems that even the name was given by others rather than one they adopted for themselves. Scholars tend use four categories to describe them:

1. **A religious sect** with specific beliefs, particularly around Judaism's oral traditions and the temple.
2. **A political group** who used tried to influence government leaders and stir up the people, largely from the desire to preserve Judaism and the identity of God's people.
3. **A social movement** that included lay-people, and they wanted to change the way Jews lived.
4. **A school of thought**, or philosophy, who acted on their shared thinking.

So it's complicated. Which is not what I was expecting. For the most part I've just thought of the Pharisees as the bad guys. Write them off and move on. Legalistic fools.

But what we might see as legalistic, with their layers of laws upon laws, actually came from a true desire to walk obediently and bring honour to God. God asks for one thing; they do what God asks and then voluntarily do more. Their extra layers of rules both protects them from breaking God's law AND is an act of worship, a love offering.

One podcast I listened to put it like this - if someone you care for says that they'd like an orange, you might go and buy them a bunch of oranges. It's not because they need it or asked for it; it's a gift, a way of showing love. The Torah (the first 5 books of the OT) is like the orange, the Mishnah (written collection of the oral traditions) and the Talmud (commentary on the Mishnah) are like the bunch of oranges. Something extra, a gift, a voluntary act of worship and honour.

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We actually have to thank the Pharisees for the part they played in ensuring that the OT was carefully preserved. The oral traditions, the Mishnah, provided key instructions in how to follow the Torah (or in other words, *how to obey God*) and were important in correctly identifying and pronouncing ambiguous words.

Ancient Hebrew was written down without consonants or punctuation, which made it quite difficult to interpret with any level of certainty. The oral tradition allowed rabbis and scribes to develop a system over time that brought agreement and clarity on how the OT could be read and the words understood.

One of the reasons I wanted to talk about this for is because I suspect that a lot of us have been operating out of the same assumptions. It's helpful to have a more developed understanding of who the Pharisees were so we don't just write them off without much thought. The scary thing in that, however, is recognising how much we can be like the Pharisees.

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One last thing on the Pharisees before we get back to Jesus. There were two key rabbinical voices at the time - two teachers who had differing perspectives on how to interpret the Law, which came from what they saw as the second most important commandment. Everyone agreed on the first - Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength - but they argued over the second.

Shammai had a framework of obedience - obeying the Law, in this case the Sabbath, was of primary importance after loving God. That's what Shammai and his school believe God wanted most, and was the expression of the most important commandment.

Hillel, the other major voice, had a framework of love - obedience is still important, but people are more important. So for Hillel, the second most important commandment was to love your neighbour as yourself. Sound familiar?